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ALUMNI ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

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BY

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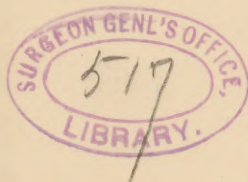


*ALUMNI ORATION.**

By HON. CHARLES EMORY SMITH,
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YOUR association, each year opening its arms, gains to-night a new accession. You welcome your younger brothers, who bring to your ranks the ardor and enthusiasm of their fresher blood. You, who join the alumni of other years in celebrating the praises of your Alma Mater, you now leave the classroom behind you and you look out upon the broad world before you. Henceforth in the great arena of free struggle you take your individual place and carve out your own particular destiny. You will feel the influence and retain the friendship of these joyous associations; you will rest upon the solid foundation, and carry the substantial equipment of this splendid training; but, henceforward, you will not be swept along by the force of associated movement, but will face the alternative

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of personal advancement, and your career will be determined by your own inspirations and achievements.

It is a noble profession upon which you enter, and an inestimable service which beckons you onward. We are all familiar with the trite maxim that "the proper study of mankind is man." But has not its very triteness blinded us to its full import? What meaning have we attached to this common and well-worn aphorism? Have we accepted it simply as a superficial truism, or have we fathomed its deep and occult signification? Have we, on the one hand, directed it primarily to his spiritual, intellectual, and emotional being? Have we, on the other, applied it chiefly to his physical nature? Or, under the later light of science and the broader illumination of liberal and progressive civilization, have we penetrated what was so long the mystery of man, and mastered the larger and more comprehensive truth that the moral and the material sides are harmoniously blended in an integral structure, and that the perfect development of the one requires the perfect development of the other?

The old conception was that the mind and body were altogether distinct, independent, and even antagonistic. The sentient nature which springs from the one was regarded as entirely foreign to and dissociated from the sensuous nature which reflects the other. The

body was condemned and despised as the debased seat of carnal evils, at war with the higher essence of our being. Instead of being recognized and honored as the fit and appropriate temple to be made by the finest cultivation the worthy and congenial repository of the loftier powers of humanity, it was treated as an alien dungeon, in which the spirit was shackled and enfeebled and degraded. This false idea taught men to mortify the flesh. It led St. Anthony to go through his long life without incurring the reproach of once washing his feet. It led St. Simeon to make his habitation, like the birds of the air, on the summit of a lofty pillar. It excited the delirium of the Flagellants to scourge themselves in the cruel penance whose frenzy has been freshly impressed upon us by the brush of the painter in the historic portraiture we saw on the walls of the Palace of Art at the great White City. It has not only been connected with much of the fanaticism which has stained the history of mankind, but it has been the fruitful cause of unnumbered wrongs in dealing with the ordinary ills of the race.

The new conception recognizes the intimate relation of the mind and the body and seeks their symmetrical development. Instead of finding the one repugnant to the other—the mind despising the body, and the body imprisoning and enchaining the mind—it finds

them sympathetic, correlative, and interdependent. We may be told that the mind is an impalpable force which is independent of matter; but none the less it manifests itself through the nerve-media of intelligence. We can enter its outer vestibule and approach its inner sanctuary through physical inquiry. You, who are specially familiar with this subject, know that if the nerve-forces are disturbed the mental balance is deranged, and that if the mind is unsettled the physical organ is diseased. "Does not the eye of the human embryo," asks Emerson, "predict the light? The ear of Handel predict the witchcraft of harmonic sound?" And may we not in the same manner ask, Does not the delicate and subtle organism of human nature predict the measure of human capabilities? Does not the individual organization predict the range and direction of individual power?

Education, with all that it can do, has its limitations. Individual development has its boundaries, determined by its basis and its capacity. You cannot rear a stately superstructure of intellect and character upon a weak and unsound foundation. Every organization has its own stamp, and no two minds are alike. "I could write as well as Shakespeare," said Charles Lamb, "if I only had a mind to, but I haven't a mind to." Humboldt could cross continents and scale the Andes

and note everything by the way; but St. Bernard, rapt in his absorbing reflections and seeing only with the eye of the soul, could ride all day along Lake Geneva, and in the evening ask where the lake was. Thomas Erskine was the greatest of forensic advocates, as Charles James Fox was the greatest of debaters and Mirabeau the greatest of orators in fiery, impassioned, five-minute outbursts. But Erskine, with all his power before the court and jury, created painful disappointment in the House of Commons; and when Pitt, after listening to his maiden speech for a time, turned away in disdain and tore up his notes in contempt, the faltering speaker sank under the sting and ended his effort in mortification and failure. What mental power made him pre-eminent when he faced twelve men in the jury-box and well-nigh impotent when he faced Parliament? What moral quality filled him with courage in the one place and with cowardice in the other? And, entering into the nervous organization, what subtle and electric connection runs from the physical attributes to these mental and moral developments?

The relation of the mind and the body in its finest sense governs destiny. No two organizations are alike. Place two persons side by side from birth; give them the same education and training; let them be surrounded

by the same conditions; and they will emerge upon the world's stage of action two entirely different beings based upon those radical and fundamental differences of organization which no education or circumstances can obliterate. We are the creatures of the law of our own being. If we understand and observe that law we can mold our own destiny. What a noble and exalted mission, then, is that of the physician! He ministers both to the body and the mind. He studies them both in their mutual relation and dependence. He plays upon the one in touching the secret springs of the other. He sounds the depths of their mystic connection and measures their reflex influence. He is the wise astrologer, with more than the astrologer's art of reading the star of destiny, for his master-power reaches beyond the exterior influence and penetrates the interior and occult forces which rule our susceptibilities, which measure our capabilities, and which determine our fate.

In his higher mission he thus becomes guide, counsellor, and confidant. He may be not merely the minister of the sick-room, but the trusted friend and adviser in the intricate web of delicate threads which make the warp and woof of our lives. He may bring not only light and solace in the dark hours of pain and anguish; not only relief and hope to the weary couch of disease; not only unselfish

service to the lowly cot of the poor ; not only the consummate skill of the unquivering hand in the trial which decides life or death ; but in the subtle pathology of the forces through which mind and body act and react he may aid in the knowledge, measurement, and application of the powers which shall shape the course of our destiny. Rightly understood, his is more than the healing art ; it is the art of revealing, developing, and improving. We summon the physician when we are sick. Perhaps it is a fanciful notion, but I sometimes wonder whether we shall not come to employ him and counsel him and obey him to keep from getting sick. The great lawyers—the Choates, the Couderts, the Carters, of New York ; the Johnsons, the Biddles, the Bullitts, of Philadelphia—are retained by their leading clients not so much to extricate them from litigation when it appears as to save them from becoming involved in litigation. They must be profound masters of the science of the law ; they must understand it in all its applications and ramifications. And, notwithstanding the thousands and tens of thousands which such mastery commands, it is cheaper to retain them to guard against law suits than it is to let the law-suits come and then take care of them. Is there any reason why we should not take similar precautions against allowing our physical powers to be put into chancery, except that we

are always taking better care of our business than of our health?

In these observations there is a suggestion of the high mission and sacred duty of the physician in his individual relation. But is there not a broader aspect? Is there not an obligation which the profession as a class owes to society as a body? Society is not an heterogeneous mass of individual units where each has sole care for itself and the least possible care for others. Especially under our system of government of the people, by the people, and for the people, there are mutual duties. It is not a question of making the least contribution to the common welfare which is compatible with the maintenance of an organized community under the protection of law, but a question of the largest measure of service which all can render in order to attain the highest common good. We look not for what is simply endurable, but for what is best. We have a right to ask every element of society to do the part of which it is most capable. The world is steadily moving forward, and what is acceptable to day will not be tolerable tomorrow. Advancement is the law of our being. Under that law progress is order, and it is stagnation which is revolution. "There is nothing so revolutionary," says Dr. Arnold, "because there is nothing so unnatural and convulsive as this strain to keep things fixed,

when all the world is, by the very law of its creation, in eternal progress; and the course of all the evils in the world can be traced to that natural but deadly error of human indolence and corruption, that our business is to preserve and not to improve."

We look to educated men especially to recognize and fulfill their large obligations to society. We know, indeed, that this is the era of keen competition and strenuous struggle. We know that it is the age when the unbounded realm of knowledge staggers the most daring explorer, and when the mastery of specialties tempts the concentration of power. We know that the man who scatters his energies and dissipates his forces fails of his highest possibilities, and that professional eminence in this day of exacting demands and intense rivalry is only to be attained by supreme devotion. The law, we are told, is a jealous mistress, and so is medicine. But the special faculty, fine as it may be, is made more potential by breadth of culture, and intelligent interest in kindred subjects quickens our perceptions in that which is our main occupation. I plead for individual liberality of effort and breadth of public spirit, but beyond that I plead for associated action in what may be called an associated professional duty. Suppose that the legal profession, as a body, should charge itself with the duty of a critical obser-

vation of the laws enacted in state or in city. Suppose it should organize its own machinery for the purpose, and divide and adjust its forces so that the burden would not be too heavy upon any of its members. Suppose it should then address itself to the task, not of passing upon the questions of policy involved in legislation, but of pointing out the crude, defective, contradictory, self-destructive forms which proposed laws often take. If we had such responsible criticism, how much imperfect and ineffective legislation would be avoided!

That is a single illustration drawn from another profession. Is there not a kindred field for high public service open before the noble profession to which you belong? If it could speak in its organized capacity and in its aggregated force upon questions of public concern which come within the legitimate scope of its inquiry, and upon which its voice could be pronounced with all the weight of its commanding authority, how much salutary influence might be exerted, and how much wholesome reform might be accomplished! The board of health works within fixed limitations. Its obligations and powers are prescribed by law. It is aimed at definite and determinate objects. Beyond its narrow and arbitrary boundaries there is a broad field of suggestion and inquiry connected with the healthful progress of society upon which your profession would be

justified in advising the community, and in which its intelligent and competent counsel would be of great public service. There are not merely the large problems of water-supply, adequate drainage, efficient inspection of foods; proper care of the criminal, the indigent, and the insane, and others of similar magnitude; but there are also questions of the cleanliness of streets, the promotion of open spaces, the purification of tainted districts, and a hundred others which are constantly arising in the growth of a great metropolitan city. I see before me a large body of trained, earnest, and forceful men. You have the unity of fraternal association. You have the thorough equipment of a splendid institution. You have the inspiration of generous emulation and the pride and ambition of individual achievement. No man can estimate the measure of good which you are doing in your various spheres, and none can calculate the mighty power and influence you would exercise if you chose to move with deliberate purpose in your combined and organized strength.

Gentlemen, the triumphs of your science and the glories of your profession fire the imagination and quicken the worthiest aspirations. The beneficence of the noble work wrought by you and your compeers, by those who have led the way with the torch of discovery and those who have followed with broader illumination,

is beyond all computation. It has given new hope and meaning to our existence. It has subdued terrors, conquered remorseless disease, dissipated old dangers, mitigated madness itself, and lengthened and beautified life. It has restored eyes to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb. Its marvelous successes point the way to new and still more wonderful achievements; and the ceaseless uplifting of an ideal, ever advancing, ever beckons you onward.

